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NEWS RELEASE

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Education Secretary Duncan approves new R.I. accountability system Accountability, classification system focuses on achievement gaps, progress

Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced today (May 29) that U.S. Department of Education has approved a request from the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) to implement a new system for classification of schools and for providing support to schools with low achievement levels, minimal progress, or significant achievement gaps.

Rhode Island is in the first group of states to receive approval from the Department during the current round of review.

The new accountability system, which RIDE designed over the past six months with input from the education field and from the public, will enable RIDE to:

- focus on achievement gaps;
- diagnose school performance by identifying specific shortcomings and achievements at each school;
- provide each school with the specific support or intervention needed to improve student achievement; and
- provide these schools with the ability to select interventions that respond to their context and their needs.

“The new accountability system that Education Secretary Arne Duncan approved today will enable us to provide our schools with the support they need to overcome challenges and to improve student achievement,” said Governor Lincoln D. Chafee. “This is an important step in our work toward providing a world-class education for all Rhode Island students.”

“These eight additional states are getting more flexibility with federal funds and relief from NCLB’s one-size-fits-all federal mandates in order to develop locally tailored solutions to meet their unique educational challenges,” said Secretary Duncan. “States must show they are protecting children in order to get flexibility. These states met that bar.”

“We are pleased that the U.S. Department of Education has recognized the high quality of the accountability system we designed,” said George D. Caruolo, Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “I commend Rhode Island educators for their work in the design and the development of this new system.”

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“With our new system of accountability, support, and intervention, we will focus on the specific problems unique to each school in Rhode Island,” said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “We look forward to using our new accountability system as we work together with students, teachers, and school leaders to accelerate all schools toward greatness.”

Over the next month, RIDE will use data from the statewide NECAP mathematics and reading assessments and the high-school graduation rates to develop the 2012 school classifications.

RIDE proposed the new accountability system in a request submitted in February to the U.S. Department of Education seeking flexibility regarding provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. The No Child Left Behind Act, which became federal law ten years ago, establishes the accountability system that RIDE currently uses to classify schools and to intervene in schools that miss their annual targets. The current accountability system sets the same annual target for each school, regardless of its current level of achievement, and proscribes the same set of initiatives for all schools that miss annual targets.

Under the new system, RIDE will classify schools based on:

- **Proficiency:** How many students have attained proficiency or better?
- **Distinction:** How many students have attained distinction?
- **Gap-closing:** Is the school serving all students, including those with disabilities and English Learners?
- **Progress:** Is the school approaching its 2017 targets?
- **Growth (K-8):** Are all students making progress?
- **Improvement (high schools):** Is the school improving annually?
- **Graduation (high schools):** Are all students ready for success?

After classifying schools using these measures, RIDE will identify schools in need of support and intervention and will diagnose the needs of each identified school. Each school that RIDE identifies will develop a multi-year intervention plan, which RIDE will monitor. The plans will include numerous reform strategies – in the areas of leadership, support, infrastructure, and content – that will be targeted to address the specific needs of each identified school.

RIDE will also use the classification system to commend schools that have attained high achievement levels or that are making dramatic progress.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Education offered states the opportunity to apply for flexibility regarding some provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. Last year, 11 states requested and received flexibility. Rhode Island was one of 26 states to seek flexibility during a second round of requests. Eight states received approval today.

To win approval of the new accountability system, RIDE also had to demonstrate to the U.S. Department of Education that the state had made significant progress on adopting and implement the Common Core State Standards and to putting into place a system that evaluates all educators annually, based in part of evidence of student growth and achievement.

For more information on the RIDE flexibility request, including a complete request that the Department approved today, see:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/eseaflex.aspx>

For information from the U.S. Department of Education on flexibility requests, see:

<http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility/requests>

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